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AUTHOR Keedy, John L.; Thompson, E. Herbert
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a case study evaluation of the first year of an inservice staff development program in Galax City Schools, Virginia. The program was designed to teach teachers how to deliver subject matter associated with "The Teaching of Thinking Skills Program," sponsored by a Chapter II Competitive Block Grant. The program had two components and two teacher trainer consultants: one for "Writing to Learn" and the other for "Reading to Learn." The purpose of the case study was to assess teacher attitudes toward the program and program effectiveness. The data collection instruments consisted of an attitude questionnaire; observations of training sessions; and interviews with teachers, consultants, and administrators. The evaluation concluded that teachers felt the program to be worthwhile, but that the quality of the training sessions required instructional delivery improvement. These improvements included decreasing day-long inservice presentations, diversifying instructional materials, providing subject matter thematic unity, reducing class size, and having more enthusiastic teacher trainers. (JAM)

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EVALUATION OF A STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

John L. Keedy
West Georgia College

E. Herbert Thompson
Emory and Henry College

Mid-South Educational Research Association
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INTRODUCTION

Michael Patton (1979) defined utilization-focused evaluation as accommodation: "The evaluator does not attempt to mold and manipulate decisionmakers and information users to accept the evaluator's preconceived notions about what constitutes useful or high quality research.... Utilization-focused evaluation brings together evaluators, decision makers, and information users in an active-reactive-adaptive process where all participants share responsibility for creatively shaping and rigorously implementing an evaluation that is both useful and of high quality" (p. 289). This paper describes an evaluation of the first year of a staff development program in Galax City Schools, a small rural school system in Virginia (student enrollment: 1200 students). The evaluator's purpose was to assess teacher change process, since this school system had little history of staff development. Because this system used several of the evaluator's findings (i.e. recommendations) in the second year of the staff development, this paper, in effect, describes a case study of the utilization-focused evaluation.

BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Teaching of Thinking Skills Program was made possible through funds provided by a Chapter II Competitive Block Grant from the Virginia State Department of Education (1986). The program was designed to bring together three components of critical thinking--reading-to-learn, writing-to-learn, and differentiated instruction--and provide various groups of teachers with training in each area. The writing-to-learn consultant provided a workshop for interested teachers in early August before the beginning of the 1986-87 school year and during a subsequent in-service day. He also met with dialogue groups from each level and actually worked with some teachers individually, observing them, teaching with them, and talking with them about what had happened.

The reading-to-learn consultant held a summer reading-to-learn institute at Emory & Henry College during the summer of 1986. Four Galax teachers participated in this week-long workshop. She consulted with teachers in the reading-to-learn dialogue group, observing their classes, and discussing how instruction could be improved. The differentiated instruction component of the program actually

began during the 1985-86 school year. This component functioned in much the same way as the other two did. However, the original consultant was unable to continue her work due to personal reasons. Because this component had started during the previous year, the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction (ASI) and the evaluator decided time could be best used evaluating the first two program components: Writing to Learn[1.] and Reading to Learn.[2.] (Appendix A contains the chronology of the three staff development programs.)

The data collection instruments consisted of a questionnaire, observation of training sessions, and interviews of teachers, consultants, and administrators. (Appendix B contains a description of evaluation procedures.) The evaluation design approximated that of an exploratory case study. The program evaluator's role--as defined in the grant application--was to describe factors that helped or hindered teacher change. The case study design, and its emphasis on school/district context, might best identify factors in need of change for the second year of this staff development program.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CERTAIN STAFF DEVELOPMENT DIMENSIONS

The Quality of Training

Naturally, different groups of teachers viewed the various components of the training in different ways. Some teachers felt that the writing to learn workshop was very helpful, while others thought it was a waste of time. The writing-to-learn in-service presentations that the evaluator observed were well done. The results of the questionnaires sent out in late November do indicate that most teachers in the Galax system have some understanding of what writing-to-learn and reading-to-learn mean. Their understanding, however, is neither as clear nor as complete as those in charge of the program would like. Of course, responses to questions on a questionnaire filled out by teachers who are busy can only be partially trusted. An important point to remember here is that some very good teachers, who have in fact demonstrated their ability to put the various theories they have become acquainted with into action effectively, were among those who did not appreciate the Writing to Learn (WTL) workshop. Some felt the presenters were not aiming their expectations high enough,

while others felt that the presenters needed to really be "gung ho," and full of evangelical enthusiasm.

All of the teachers who participated in the summer reading-to-learn institute (RTL) at Emory & Henry College found the experience to be fulfilling and worthwhile. As they watched the consultants and her doctoral student do demonstration lessons that illustrated how reading-to-learn theory was applied to texts from different disciplines, all the teachers who participated said that they were better able to conceptualize how to put the theories into practice. The follow-up work they did for each demonstration, where small groups worked on their own plan that applied reading-to-learn principles to their own textbooks, insured that these teachers were prepared to put reading-to-learn to work in their classrooms immediately. Those teachers who joined the reading-to-learn dialogue group at the beginning of school, because of personal interest, found that they had missed a lot by not attending the summer institute. They used the strategies, but they did not integrate them into an overall plan of instruction consistent with reading-to-learn theory.

All teachers interviewed at end of 1987 school year praised both the WTL and RTL consultants (one of whom also conducted

the two-day WTL workshop). Both made them feel at ease. These teachers also said that they felt one of the best components of the training they received was when the consultants worked with small groups of them in their own classrooms. They considered this time very helpful to their instructional program. The only criticism they had was that they wanted to see both of these people do even more work with their classes of real students. They wanted to see experts put theory into practice.

Some of the very best teachers said that participation in these programs, at least at this point, should be left up to the teachers. The consensus was that some teachers are never going to change and forcing them to take part in these programs, even if at only a tacit level, did more harm than good. These excellent teachers agreed that they appreciated the opportunities they were being given to grow, but they wanted to remind those in charge of several points:

-Number of participants aren't important. It's quality that counts.

-Teachers already have so many things to do that they ought to have some control over how they spend their professional time.

-If those who are interested participate actively in programs and begin to get positive results from their students and recognition for themselves, the resulting enthusiasm will motivate other teachers to join the program.

-Some teachers will never change, so why try to do the impossible.

Recommendations

1. Reduce the amount of time teachers must spend in day-long in-service presentations. Also, understand the limitations of such presentations and, therefore, maintain more realistic expectations and provide a sharper focus for those in-service presentations that still must be conducted.

2. Find ways to provide more experiences for teachers like the summer institute in reading-to-learn. Apparently, this kind of practical workshop atmosphere was productive in helping teachers learn how to put new theories into practice. Classes offered during the school year, through the auspices of a university or college, and taught by the right people, might also accomplish the same ends.

3. Find ways to get consultants to work with small groups of interested teachers more frequently. If, in fact, some teachers are never going to change, why not help those who are willing to do so? Give those teachers who do try to change and do participate in the programs made available to them some recognition or support for doing so. This recognition doesn't have to be spectacular. For example, the teachers appreciated that the ASI provided substitutes for their classes while they were working with one of the consultants and observing each other. Why not continue this practice for small groups of interested teachers? Such a policy would cost money, but it wouldn't cost that much when compared to the benefits these teachers and, as a result, their students might receive.

Dialogue Groups

Those who found the dialogue groups to be helpful were already some of the better teachers. They found the concept of sharing with one another to be congruent with the approach to teaching and education they were already following. Many teachers, however, found the dialogue groups to be a waste of time. Some teachers reported that some of their peers couldn't see the point to them, since

the current fads would eventually be replaced by others. Therefore, why should they bother to contribute to something that eventually wouldn't mean anything? Other teachers said that they needed more training in how to make such groups work. They were willing to continue meeting in their groups, but they needed to know how to make better use of their time. Finally, some of the groups, e.g., one of the better groups of teachers, the reading-to-learn group, found that given demands on their time, it was almost impossible to find a common meeting time.

Recommendations

1. Provide further training, perhaps a brief workshop, where all teachers are shown a demonstration of an effective dialogue group in action. Provide time for questions and answers and for each of the dialogue groups to then meet individually and then report problems back to the large group. This training might be an appropriate topic for an in-service day, especially since many teachers requested such training.

2. Encourage, but do not require, teachers to work in their dialogue groups as frequently as they can.

3. Bring in consultants (these could be trained teachers from other schools) to work with those dialogue groups who express an interest in improving their performance.

Lack of Time

One of the most frequent complaints made by everyone associated with the program was that there just wasn't enough time to deal with both program components. There were several reasons for this complaint. In a few cases, it was given as a reason for doing nothing. In other cases, because teachers felt under pressure to cover the material required in their course or to "finish the book," they viewed the various reading and writing-to-learn strategies as "add ons" to what they were already doing, and therefore, unnecessary. These teachers didn't understand that if they accurately conceptualized how reading and writing-to-learn worked, that these activities would actually replace some of the things they were doing with students and improve their students' academic performance as well. Some very good teachers said that they didn't have time to do the professional reading they needed to do in order to fully understand how to put these theories into practice. Beyond the day-to-day demands of teaching, some teachers were so over extended in terms of their extra-curricular

sponsorships, that they really didn't have much time left over. Even those teachers who were effectively putting the theories they had learned into practice said that the amount of planning it took to do so was often prohibitive.

Teachers frequently don't have enough time to do all that they would like. Those teachers who view reading and writing-to-learn activities as an addition to an already crowded program of instruction can be helped by one of the earlier suggestions the evaluator made about providing a certain kind of workshop. As far as those who are over-extended with extra-curricular activities, in a small school system there is almost nothing that can be done about this problem. Several activities need to be supervised by teachers and there are only a small, finite number of teachers to cover them. Finally, from an administrators' standpoint, finding ways to give teachers more time is difficult. There are only so many ways teachers and students can be scheduled during a school day.

Recommendations

1. Consider increasing the number of periods in the school day so that teachers can have two planning periods. For those teachers who don't normally have a planning period, perhaps provide them with a common block of time

for planning once a week. Teachers might be able to use some of this time to work with other teachers, perhaps in pairs if not in groups.

2. Provide open work days in the school calendar where teachers can have time to catch up on paper work and to do individual and/or small group planning. Provide incentives of some kind to encourage teachers to use at least a portion of this time for work in their dialogue groups.

Administration of the Program and Teacher Change

Initially the evaluator had a hard time understanding how the three components fit together. The program lacked focus. At the end of the interview with the RTL consultant, she expressed concern that the teachers might have difficulty in implementing many of these new theories because there were so many things happening. She was afraid that some of her reading-to-learn people would "burn out." As the program went along, teachers at various points complained that it was difficult enough to get everything else done that they had to do. They found the added burden of dealing with writing-to-learn, and in some cases two or all three of the components, taxing to say the least. One

teacher interviewed at end of the year told the evaluator that the program lacked focus, and this had caused both teachers and building administrators problems.

As the previous paragraph demonstrates, many teachers had a difficult time trying to competently deal with whichever of the three components of the program they were responsible for. This difficulty led to frustration and to complaints of lack of time and teachers saying that pressure was being put on them. One of the consultants told the evaluator that many teachers felt that the central administration was out to "move" the system and that the teachers resented this pressure.

Clearly, there is a problem of communication. Granted, the program could have been more focused, and perhaps it was too ambitious to try to do all of these things at once. Still, the central administration was trying to obtain funds to support their professional development program. In the real world of public schools, such programs can't always be tied together in a "nice, neat package." Some teachers complained about "being left out in the dark" about what was supposed to happen during the program and what was really expected of them. Granted, the central administration perhaps should have involved more teachers in planning both

the program and the direction it would take. Realistically, however, it is not always possible to involve teachers in such planning, even though administrators might want to. First, to help in the planning, teachers have to leave their classrooms, which may put them further behind with their work, thus frustrating them. Further, program planning often needs to be done during the summer. Even if administrators pay teachers, it is frequently hard to get the right group of teachers together who can really plan a good program. Finally, administrators don't work in classrooms everyday so that they will have time to do this kind of work. In other words, such planning is a part of what they are paid to do.

There is no question that many teachers felt frustrated about many facets of the program, but the evaluator didn't think their feelings were really caused by something the central administration did or did not do. Perhaps the central administration could have been more direct about admitting deficiences and ambiguities in the program and have pledged themselves to clear up these problems in the best way possible. However such candor might not have been sufficient to remove the pressure and frustration that some teachers were feeling. No matter what an administrator says, there will be a percentage of teachers who will not

believe what they're told, even if administrators "cross their hearts and hope to die." This phenomenon occurs, in part, because everyone's understanding of the world around them is affected and tempered by the various experiences they've had in their lives. If teachers have been misled by administrators before, it takes them a long time to forget. Further, most people really don't think, if you dig deep enough anad if they are honest with themselves, that anyone else's way of doing things is any better than the way they would do it. Finally, it is a difficult job to keep up with all of the things necessary to teach on a day-to-day basis. When teachers are already so busy they can barely keep up, if an administrator makes a simple request that teachers try something new, such as reading or writing-to-learn strategies, that might help them more effectively and efficiently use their time, this simple request becomes an order in the minds of many teachers. Since most conscientious teachers want to do what is expected of them, when they can't find the time to do these new things, they feel guilty and fall into the trap of blaming the person "who is asking too much of them" for all of their troubles. Some of the interviews conducted with teachers at the end of this school year illustrate this process in action.

This discussion has particular significance for those in charge of The Teaching of Thinking Skills Program. Following are some suggestions for dealing with these problems:

Recommendations

1. Regarding the current program, limit it to only one of the components for the entire system, or have certain selected groups deal with only one component and disregard the others. For example, if one group is dealing with differentiated instruction, do not require them to attend reading or writing-to-learn in-service presentations. Otherwise, teachers might end up confused.

2. The central administration needs to go beyond what would typically be required of them to communicate to teachers the following things about the program:

   -Why teachers are being asked to engage in the various components of the program.

   -Openly identify for teachers what problems the administration sees with the program and actively seek suggestions for possible solutions to these problems from teachers and building-level administrators.

3. Involve a small but diversified, representative group of teachers in planning the future of the program.

4. Strive to plan visits from consultants as far in advance as possible to prevent anyone from being surprised by an unexpected visit from a so-called expert. Of course, this kind of planning is not always possible.

5. Explore ways to keep in touch with how the program is functioning that will not threaten teachers or cause them to do "busy work," e.g., filling out Dialogue Group Response Forms that no one will ever read.

RESULTS OF EVALUATION

The program evaluator met with the ASI in June, 1987 to discuss ways to improve the staff development program for the following year (1987-88). Several recommendations were implemented:

1. The program had more focus. Kindergarten through Grade Five teachers worked on developing a sequential writing program; and Grades Six through Twelve continued work on Reading-to-Learn and Writing-to-Learn teaching strategies;

2. The August, 1987 workshop presentor was a high school English teacher who could relate to secondary school teachers implementing Reading-to-Learn strategies;

3. More teachers were sent to a week-long summer workshop which provided them with the time and opportunity to conceptualize Reading-to-Learn; (these teachers presented hands-on workshops for other teachers during the year);

4. The Teacher Dialogue Groups were used only for teachers who attended the Summer workshops and for other interested teachers (in the middle and high schools);

5. The elementary school principal arranged her specialist schedule (e.g. art, music) so that all teachers of a particular grade had planning periods at the same time. The elementary school continued to use dialogue groups to study how to plan and implement a writing program.

6. Conincidentally, the high school implemented the seven-period day--allowing for more time during the day (when teachers aren't tired) for the voluntary dialogue groups to meet.

DISCUSSION: AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Introduction

An external evaluator has the objectivity and the perspective (given field experience, what program dimensions comprise an effective staff development?) to a program's development. Administrators may have some experience in staff development, but they lack objectivity because they are the gameplayers along with school board members, teachers, etc. The ASI can provide, however, another context within which the program developed, including school board-central office politics and the context of a small system.

Differentiated Instruction

In the summer of 1985 programmatic changes were made in Galax City Schools' Gifted Program. Gifted students (Grades One-Eight) would no longer be "pulled out" for special instruction. Instead these students would receive a higher-cognitive level of instruction within the regular classroom. The 1985-86 training for teachers to differentiate their instruction had been only partially successful--partly because substantial teacher changes in

classroom management were required. A second year of followup training (1986-87) was planned to provide more opportunities for teachers to make the instructional adjustments enabling differentiated instruction to be fully implemented into the teachers' teaching repertroire. This second year's training in differentiated instruction became one of three staff development components for the 1986-87 school year for teachers in grades one through eight. Although this component was not evaluated, it may have been difficult for the interviewed teachers to separate this component out from the other two components.

Writing to Learn

The school board had been concerned in 1985-86 about a need for more student writing. The ASI, helped by a Department of Education (VA) expert and a university professor, conducted a needs assessment indicating that a writing to learn program would be a practical place to start for grades K-12. (January, 1986). Once teachers and students became comfortable with informal writing, the more formal writing-to-publish program could follow--starting off with the elementary school in 1987-88. (Indeed this is what happened.) The ASI obtained competitive block grant money to finance this program component. (No money was normally

budgeted for annual staff development programs, other than one or two inservice days during the school year.) In March, 1986 a writing to learn trainer (i.e. consultant) was contracted to provide WTL services to Galax City Schools for the 1986-87 school year.

Reading to Learn

In June of 1986 the superintendent asked the ASI if another annual objective in school improvement could be added for the 1986-87 school year. (The superintendent was acting upon the advice of certain school board members.) The ASI had met at a conference a local university professor involved in Virginia's state-funded Reading to Learn program. Most training expenses would be paid by the State; Reading to Learn could complement Writing to Learn strategies and focus on Grades Six through Twelve, whereas differentiated instruction involved grades One through Eight. Finally, participating in this program would impress the school board by adding another objective at the last minute. In effect, three programs were folded into one. All were, in varying degrees, included in the competitive block grant, and the entire program labeled: "The Teaching of Thinking Skills."

The Factor of School Size

The school system's small size meant that the ASI was responsible for the entire instructional program--including special and gifted education.[3.] Staff development became a project attended to when there was a momentary lull from the many other administrative demands on his time. Had the ASI been free of Gifted program and school board pressure (i.e. add another system-wide objective in Summer, 1986 for that following August, the start of the school year), he would have spent the entire year systematically preparing teachers for the adult change process--a problem encountered during any long-range staff development program. For instance, what are the implications for teacher change presented by teaching gifted students in the regular classrooms? Can we identify potential group facilitators for the Teacher Dialogue Groups and train them during the summer?

In the "real world" of school administration in small districts, however, events can move fast and decisions made that preclude long-term planning. The perception by some teachers that the entire program lacked focus is partly the by-product of the circumstances described above.

IMPLICATION: COMPARISON OF THIS STUDY TO SCHOOL-CHANGE RESEARCH

This case study, in some aspects, compares favorably with Clark, Lotto, and Astuto's (1984) conclusions on teacher change and school improvement. These researchers concluded that school board and central office support was necessary for program adoption; teachers tended to want to be involved in: 1) the implementation (How do we teachers adapt a particular teaching strategy into our classrooms?); and 2) institutionalization (Does a school improvement effort become an accepted practice in a school?) Galax City Schools had both the school board and central office behind the program, and essentially the principals. (Full support of the principals might have been possible had use of the dialogue groups not been mandatory for all teachers.) Teachers appeared to endorse the consultants' work in the classrooms with the teachers (approximating the implementation phase). Teacher complaints about communication may have centered more on "We didn't know what was going on" than "We weren't involved in the adoption-phase decision making." This case study may approximate Clark, Lotto, and Astuto (1984) findings on the adoption and implementation phases.

Footnotes

1. A basic premise in Writing to Learn is that, if students understand a particular concept, they can explain this concept in writing clearly and concisely enough so that the teacher or other students can understand it.

2. Reading to Learn consists of tactics which help the students make their own meaning of reading assignments. For instance, the teacher can use a brief outline to connect the main ideas learned in a particular class with that night's reading assignment. Reading to Learn complements Writing to Learn: Both Learning strategies center on the student as learner--with the teacher the facilitator of the learning process.

3. Bob Cole (1988) presents a rather chilling but in many cases an accurate picture of small systems struggling to survive in poor economic areas. Galax City, fortunately, has an industrial tax base and is comparatively well off--as compared with other small districts. The size, however, puts considerable administrative restraints on staff developmenet.

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Appendix A

A. **Differentiated Instruction**

8/85 - Galax City Schools and Radford University decided to collaborate on teacher training in teaching gifted students. Sixteen of our teachers, including the librarian, would receive training from a Radford University instructor. In exchange, we would pay Radford as if these 16 teachers were taking a course. The overall purpose was to create more realistic conditions under which teachers might change, i.e., using classrooms as "laboratories."

10/85 - Ellen Tomchin, Radford Instructor, presented a definition of differentiated instruction to Galax City Schools faculty.

12/85 - Ellen Tomchin and I visited with a professor from Winthrop College who presented us with a framework within which teachers could formulate their objectives on the teaching of the gifted.

01/86 - 04/86 - Ms. Tomchin made 16 visits to the schools and met with approximately four teachers during each visit for work in the classrooms and dialogue groups following each day's visit.

05/86 - In a meeting with the Assistant Superintendent and the principals, the suggestion was made to provide continuity from year to year with training objectives. That is, we need, when appropriate, to spend two or three years on certain objectives.

07/86 - In a Chapter II Competitive Block Grant application, we applied for money to provide teacher's training in differentiated instruction.

09/86 - 05/87 - Galax City Schools contracted the services of Ms. Nancy Eiss to help teachers met different levels of student needs in their classroom with teachers recommended by their principals. Ms. Eiss visited the Elementary School and the Middle School each four times to work individually with teachers and to meet at the end of the school day with the teachers, respective principals, and the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction in dialogue groups to review the successful and unsuccessful strategies of that day.

B. **Reading to Learn**

02/86 - Dr. Reedy met Dr. Rosary Lalik at a convention in Virginia and set up a meeting to discuss the Statewide program, reading to learn.

06/86 - Dr. Lalik and Dr. Reedy met with Dr. Robert Harrison, Division Superintendent, regarding Galax participation in the reading-to-learn program.

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06/86 - The principals were asked to invite interested teachers to participate in the piloting of this reading-to-learn program.

06/86 - The piloting of the reading-to-learn program was made a division-wide objective by the Galax City School Board.

08/86 - Four teachers from Galax City Schools attended a five-day course on reading to learn presented at Emory College.

09/86 - Dr. Keedy meet with the participating teachers in the first exchange of information, i.e., dialogue group with the four teachers.

11/86 - Mr. Sams, Ms. Keith, Dr. Keedy, and Dr. Lalik met with the participating teachers — joined by two teachers who volunteered to join the program. During this meeting, the basic format was set up for Dr. Lalik, including classroom visitations and dialogue group meetings.

01/87 - 05/87 - Dr. Lalik made several visits to the schools and worked with teachers in their classrooms regarding strategies implementing the reading-to-learn program.

05/87 - Dr. Keedy and Dr. Lalik will meet regarding proposals for more extensive school division participation in this program for next year.

C. Writing to Learn

07/85 - Galax City School Board had made improvment of our student writing a division-wide objective.

09/85 - Dr. Keedy met with Mrs. Judy Self from the Department of Education regarding effective programs in reading to learn.

09/85 - A committee of teachers was set up to help assess our current writing program.

10/85 - Dr. Warren Self of Radford University made an "awareness presentation" on the difference between writing to learn and writing-as-a-process, and the advantages accruing to teachers using writing to learn. In the same in-service, teachers in the entire division were split into "pyramid groups"; teachers were asked to read two articles on writing to learn and within their groups to rank order various activities involved in writing to learn. The purpose of these groups was to familiarize teachers with the basic principles of writing to learn.

11/85 - The committee, Dr. Keedy, Ms. Self, and Dr. Pat Kelly from VPI & SU formulated a 16-item assessment on our writing-to-learn program.

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11/85 - All faculty and administrators filled out this questionnaire.

01/86 - Responses to the questionnaire were tabulated and Mr. Harrison and Dr. Keedy met with Ms. Self and Dr. Kelly to both analyze the assessment and make recommendations for the 1986-87 year. The recommendation was to introduce reading to learn as a division-wide objective and to use dialogue groups to help implement this objective.

03/86 - Dr. Dick Harrington of Piedmont Community College was contracted as the division-wide trainer for the writing-to-learn program.

07/86 - Dr. Harrington conducted a workshop for the principals and the central office administrators on the basic concepts of writing to learn.

08/86 - Dr. Harrington presented a two-day workshop to all teachers of the Galax City Schools on writing to learn.

10/86 - Dr. Harrington returned on our in-service day to answer concerns various teachers had as they implemented writing to learn in their classrooms.

12/86 - 03/87 - Dr. Harrington visited each of the three schools and worked with teachers selected by their principals in the classroom and then met with all participating in dialogue groups at the end of the day.

04/87 - Teachers assessed the writing-to-learn program by filling out an assessment instrument.

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Appendix B

Evaluation Plan

E.H. Thompson

During my October 13, 1986 visit to the Galax City Public Schools, I met with Dr. John Keedy, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, and the high school, middle school, and elementary school principals. During this meeting I outlined an evaluation plan for the program that I thought best, given the circumstances and limitations we were dealing with. The plan that I proposed at that time had to be altered somewhat. What follows is a description of what was actually done.

EVALUATION PROCEDURES

1. **I described both the training teachers and administrators have received and the proposed follow-up support to this training.**

2. **All teachers and administrators who participated in the various components of the training completed a questionnaire that allowed them to explain their understanding of the concepts addressed in the training and their applications of these concepts in their particular classrooms and schools (See attached sample questionnaire and cover letter).**

   I decided to use an open-ended, free response questionnaire. Using this kind of instrument was cumbersome, but it was possible to do so, especially given the small size of the population involved. When I first received all of the questionnaires, my original intention was to examine all responses, determine categories into which those responses fit, then code each questionnaire item, and then feed this information into to a computer for appropriate statistical analysis. I did not do such an analysis, nor do I feel that it was (or is) necessary. I have listed information gathered from this survey in tabulated form in Section III of the final report and have included excerpts from some of the responses to add texture. *Confidentiality of all respondents was maintained.*

3. **I monitored the effectiveness of the dialogue groups.**

   In order to carry out this part of the evaluation, I collected the Dialogue Group Response Forms (a simple summary sheet describing what happened during each group session) from the various schools at three times during the year, specifically during November, December, and May. Also, I observed the selected dialogue groups as they interacted during visits from both Rosary Lalik, reading-to-learn trainer and consultant, and Dick Harrington, writing-to-learn trainer and consultant,

4. **I interviewed and observed selected teachers.**

   At the meeting with Dr. Keedy and the principals on October 13, I suggested that I identify at least four teachers to be observed and interviewed, based on their questionnaire responses. I hoped to find teachers who fell into the following categories: Trained in writing-to-learn but not enthusiastic; trained in writing-to-learn and convinced of its usefulness; trained in writing-to-learn and reading-to-learn and enthusiastic about the possibilities; and no training in reading-to-learn but meeting with the reading-to-learn dialogue group. Of course, there were other possibilities, e.g., interviewing and observing a teacher who is "turned off" by the whole program. After that meeting, however, I decided that since the focus of the whole grant was on positive teacher change, I needed to approach the interviewing and observations of teachers from a more positive point of view.

To this end, I decided to focus the observations on only those people who went to the reading-to-learn institute during the summer of 1986. This group was most likely to show the most positive change, since all of the group members had received training in two of the areas addressed in the grant and two of them had received training in all three areas. By focusing on this group--interviewing and observing them and watching them in subsequent training sessions and in their different dialogue groups--I think I got a good sense of how at least two of the components of the program were working. I also observed teachers who joined the reading-to-learn dialogue group and the writing-to-learn dialogue group based on their own interest and desire. Observing these teachers gave me a chance to examine what power the dialogue group had to change teaching behaviors with little or no specialized training.

a. *Dialogue Group Observations*: I observed the selected teachers as they worked in their dialogue groups with Rosary Lalik and Dick Harrington.

b. *Pre-observation Conferences*: To the extent possible, I sat in on and observed the pre-observation conferences that both Rosary and Dick conducted prior to observing in a teacher's classroom. The purpose of these conferences was to clarify for the observers what they could expect to see and how the consultant might be most useful, e.g., teaching a portion of the class, looking for a particular behavior from either teachers or students, etc.

c. *Classroom Observations* I, along with either Rosary or Dick, observed a class conducted by the teacher who had just been interviewed. The time of the observation was agreed upon by all parties.

d. *Post-observation Conferences*: I observed and made notes as either Dick or Rosary talked with teachers individually or in their dialogue groups at the end of the day about what had happened in the classes observed. The consultants and the teachers examined each other's perceptions of what had happened and discussed what could be done to improve the class's performance.

5. **All initial responders completed a follow-up questionnaire.**

   At the direction of Mr. Robert Harrison, Division Superintendent of the Galax City Public Schools, Dr. Keedy conducted his own survey to provide the local school board with interim information on the success of the reading-to-learn and writing-to-learn components of program. Because of this survey, I chose not to do a follow-up one of my own. An analysis of these questionnaires and Dr. Keedy's recommendations are contained in **Appendix E** of the final report.

6. **I interviewed certain teachers selected by the middle and high school principals (a source of error was introduced here but it was necessary politically within the school system) and asked them for their assessment of the program.**

   A summary of what was said in these interviews comprises Section VI of the final report. Because the names of those teachers who were interviewed are well known to everyone associated with this program, I edited and disguised their comments and mixed the order of their presentation in the final report to insure confidentiality. I have not, however, changed the substance of what they said.

The proposed plan was an ambitious one, and we were able to complete a great deal of it, though we had to make adjustments as we went along. During December, January, and February, my time was extremely limited due to my heavy teaching load and other commitments. Unfortunately, this was the time when my own independent interviews and observations might have been most revealing. I had to settle for interviews and observations as I accompanied either Rosary or Dick when they were working in the schools. The only exception was at the end, when I conducted interviews with selected teachers alone.

Cover Letter for Questionnaire

November 18, 1986

Teachers and Administrators
Galax City Public Schools
Galax, VA 24333

Dear Educator:

Enclosed is a questionnaire designed to give you the opportunity to share your understanding of three concepts being emphasized in "The Teaching of Thinking Skills" program in the Galax City Public Schools. I know that by asking you to write your responses freely, I am making the task of completing the questionnaire more difficult. However, I really want your honest answers to these questions, and I do not want to limit the quality of your responses by only giving you a few predetermined answers to choose from. I know that when you have many classes to teach and many students to deal with, it is hard to find the time to do what I am asking you to do. Still, I want you to have as much personal input into the final evaluation report as possible. I need to know what you are thinking in order to accurately report your feelings and perceptions.

Though you are not required to, I do want you to put your name on the questionnaire. I am doing this for one reason only. I want to be able to match your responses on this questionnaire with a second one we may do in the spring. I could make these comparisons by using an elaborate system of numbering for each questionnaire, but I think such a procedure is cumbersome, if not a little sneaky. **Your responses will be kept confidential.** I am the only person who will see your individual questionnaire other than you. The data from all of the questionnaires will be categorized and coded and then reported in aggregate form. No names of individuals will be used when referring to questionnaire responses. Of course, you will have access to the final report.

After you have finished the questionnaire, please mail it directly to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions you want to ask me about the questionnaire or about any part of the overall program evaluation, don't hesitate to give me a call(1-944-3121), write to me, or talk with me when I am in Galax.

I want to thank you in advance for the time I know that you will use to the complete this questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Herb Thompson
Emory & Henry College
Emory, VA 24327

Program Evaluation Questionnaire: Teaching Thinking Skills

Name _____ **Date** _____

Academic Level Where You Do Most of Your Work: [circle one]

1. K-3
2. 4-5
3. 6-8
4. 9-12
5. Special Education (K-5) or (6-8) or (9-12) [circle one]
6. Speciality Teacher (e.g., guidance, P.E., music)
7. Administrator

Received Gifted Training 1985-86: Yes No

Subjects Taught (e.g., self-contained, math, English, biology):

_____

***Directions**: Answer the following questions as clearly as you can and in as much detail as you feel is appropriate. You may use the back of each page for your responses, as long as you clearly label which item is being continued. Please use either a pen or a soft-lead pencil when writing your answers. After you you complete the questionnaire, please place it in the pre-addressed envelope and mail it. (The small boxes within each larger question box are for coding purposes. Please leave them blank.)*

CRITICAL THINKING: DIFFERENTIATED QUESTIONING

1. What does the concept "differentiated instruction" mean to you? ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. How frequently do you think differentiated instruction should be used in a classroom? ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. How often are you able to use differentiated instruction in your classroom?

4. How is your students' learning affected by the differentiated instruction you use?

WRITING-TO-LEARN

1. What does the concept "writing-to-learn" mean to you?

2. How frequently do you think writing-to-learn activities should be used in a classroom?

3. How often are you able to use writing-to-learn activities in your classroom?

4. How is your students' learning affected by engaging in writing-to-learn activities?

READING-TO-LEARN

1. What does the concept "reading-to-learn" mean to you?

2. How frequently do you think reading-to-learn activities should be used in a classroom?

3. How often are you able to use reading-to-learn activities in your classroom?

4. How is your students' learning affected by engaging in reading-to-learn activities?